

Sermon for 9 March 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

First Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalter: (*Insert: leader and people*) Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16;

Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

Sermon:

Away we go!

We are now in the most intense part of the Christian story. We call it Lent. It tells what happened after Jesus had been born in a manger to a poor Jewish couple in the time of the Roman Empire. It tells how he grew up and became a wonderful man who was kind and forgiving and insisted that all people were worth being loved and treated kindly. He taught all the things the God the Jewish people worshipped, , and he had great gifts of healing and did lovely things to bring people together, such as sharing what we call Holy Communion.

And after all this, we saw him last Sunday ... or we heard three of his disciples tell how they saw him, looking almost magical, in bright white light, and talking with the great leader, Moses, and the great prophet, Elijah ... and then they all heard a voice saying, "This is my son, my chosen; listen to him!" and understood that was the voice of God. Then they went down from the mountain together, to the crowds that were waiting for him, and he healed a man's only son from epilepsy.

Now, today, we are entering the time every year when we see him through to the end of his earthly life. It is a time when we listen to the last stories of that life, and then to his sad death, until Easter.

What we learn is different each year, depending on where we are and what's happening to us and to the rest of the world. Just like all year round, we listen and pray and study and talk together about these things, and we use the Bible to help us make good use of all the stories and sayings that it carries.

Lent, we remind each other, is full of insights about the hard things of life. It brings us, year by year, into more understanding of the ways of God with human beings and all the rest of the world. Just as last Sunday we identified with Jesus in his special moment with God, so now we think of ourselves living through the special times that come to us when, even if it's hard, and even frightening, and sometimes painful, we are like Jesus and God loves us just as we know God loved Jesus and all the people around him, and all the people who were before him, and all the birds and animals and everything we know about the whole world. We know God still loves, Jesus, alive and with us, growing and developing just as Jesus did right up until he finished his life as we know it and became alive in another way, as we all hope to as well.

So let us listen, today, to how Jesus met his hard times and came through them safely. Let us not forget what we've learned so far, about before he was born, and what happened in all those

times when people were first learning to love and live with God before Jesus was born. Let us remember how we waited in Advent when we expected Jesus. Let us remember Christmas, when he was a tiny baby, just as each of us once was. Then let us remember how the Wise Men came and other people recognized our way of seeing God was real for us, and all the stories and sayings we've been reviewing during this time of revelation called Epiphany... and now, accept God's ways of talking seriously, that we call Lent.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, help us learn to love, and to let you love us, through everything that happens, through Jesus, whom we call Christ. Amen.